

**Early Childhood Longitudinal Study,
Birth Cohort: Combined Kindergarten-
1st Grade Field Test
(ECLS-B, K-1 Field Test)
Field Test Report #2**

**School Contact and Teacher
Survey Methodology**

May 2006

Project No. 08116.013

Karen Morgan

Conducted by
RTI International
P.O. Box 12194
Research Triangle Park, NC 27709

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School Contact and Teacher Survey Methodology

1. Overview of the School Contacting Process

For the Kindergarten 2006 National Study, an estimated 75 percent of the children in the birth cohort will have entered a more formalized educational setting for the first time. Almost all are expected to be attending school in a public or private setting by 2007. The children's preparedness for learning in the school environment can now be evaluated and examined in relation to earlier developmental measures and life events. A key source of information on the school readiness of these children is the teacher in whose classroom they are placed. Also, teacher practices and school characteristics can impact school adjustment and early school achievement.

One of the key goals for the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study-Birth Cohort Combined Kindergarten-1st Grade (ECLS-B K-1) Field Test was to test a variety of school data collection activities to determine which might be the most effective and efficient for maximizing school cooperation and teacher response rates. For the ECLS-Kindergarten Cohort, schools within Primary Sampling Units (PSUs) were sampled. It was critical that those sampled schools be recruited into the study; therefore a great deal of time, effort, and expense went into gaining their cooperation. The recruitment process began at the state level, gaining the support and approval of the Chief State School Officers (CSSOs). Then district-level commitments were secured, followed by recruitment of the schools. When approval was obtained, whole classrooms of children were identified for participation.

With the use of a birth cohort, sample dispersion from the initial clustered sampling frame after 4 to 5 years is expected to be substantial. Pre-field test projections suggested that each identified school would have on average 1.5 study participants. That translated into one or two teachers in a school being asked to complete a single questionnaire after written consent was obtained from parents. Given the negligible level of burden on the school and the substantial cost and effort to proceed with the hierarchical recruitment process described above, the K-1 Field Test opted to try a passive consent process. All state CSSOs, district superintendents (if applicable), and school principals/head school administrators were sent an informational packet describing the ECLS-B project and its intent to send the "parent-identified" teacher a questionnaire. Also, a follow-up call was placed to the school principal to confirm receipt of the packet and answer any questions. If the principal expressed no concern or made no mention of a mandatory district-level approval process, the teacher questionnaire was mailed. Sections 2 through 6 describe in chronological order the various stages in identifying and contacting schools in preparation for the mailing of teacher questionnaires.

2. Advance Identification of Schools and Districts

One procedure to be tested during the K-1 Field Test was the effectiveness of a school and district advance notification process. The ECLS-B National Study wants to collect teacher data as contemporaneously as possible with the child assessment data. Schools that know in advance about the ECLS-B project and its expected minimal burden on school staff might be

more cooperative and complete the contacting process faster, allowing teacher questionnaires to be mailed sooner. This advance notification process will be discussed in more detail in Section 3. However, to test whether advance notification of the schools and districts was helpful, advance information from the parents about where their child might be attending kindergarten in the fall of 2005 was required.

2.1 Parental Predictions of Child's Fall 2005 School during Preschool Collection

As part of the parent CAPI interview during the Preschool Field Test in fall 2004, sample members in the “full study procedures” group were asked the following questions:

PA103a. Some parents decide in advance where their children will attend kindergarten. Do you know where {CHILD/TWIN} will attend kindergarten?

PA103b. What is the name of the school where {CHILD/TWIN} will attend kindergarten?

PA103c. Is that school here in {STATE} or in some other state?

PA103d. What is the address of the school?

Seventy-four percent of parents said they knew where their child would be attending kindergarten the following fall. Of that 74 percent, 74 percent provided the field interviewer with this information. Comparing the schools named during the preschool round with the actual kindergartens attended in the K-1 Field Test, 79 percent of these parents accurately predicted 10 to 12 months in advance the kindergarten their child would attend.

2.2 Panel Maintenance Mailing

Letters were sent to all of the participants in the Preschool Field Test who resided in the eight PSUs included in the K-1 Field Test. This letter (see attachment 1) asked parents to update their contact information, i.e., address and phone numbers. It also requested information about when and where parents thought their child would be attending kindergarten. The form provided to capture this information is shown in attachment 2.

The panel maintenance mailing was intended to occur early enough in the spring that additional schools identified on the returned forms by parents could be included in the school and district advance notification process. However, the Ethics Review Board (ERB) approval came too late. This information was still valuable for identifying additional schools to be added to the school lookup table in the parent CAPI instrument described in section 5.1.

The response rate to the panel maintenance was much higher than the 15 to 20 percent typically seen. Of the 516 parents who were mailed letters, 283 returned the form for a response rate of 55 percent. In the Preschool Field Test with just the standard contact information questions, the response rate was 22 percent. For the Preschool National Study panel maintenance mailing, a 23 percent response rate was seen. There are several possible explanations for this increased response rate. The need to provide additional information regarding kindergarten attendance may have been more motivating than simply confirming already accurate information. The increased privacy afforded with the provision of an envelope in which to return the information rather than the traditionally utilized postcard may have helped. Also, the addition of new families during the Preschool Field Test and the shorter gap in time between the last home visit and this mailing may have played a contributing role. Regardless of the reason for the

higher response rate, the effort to gain advance information about the schools likely to have study participants was successful.

2.3 Matching of Parent-Furnished Information with NCES Databases

The school names and addresses provided by the parents had to be matched to those listed in the NCES Common Core of Data (CCD) or the Private School Universe Survey (PSS) databases to obtain the NCES school identification number. Once found, that number could be quickly linked to confirm the accuracy and completeness of the school name and address, as well as to get the affiliated district name and address. However, this matching process was manual; to obtain this number, every school had to be looked up individually in the NCES database.

Diocesan offices were not available in the NCES databases. However, we did not encounter the need during this field test to contact any diocesan offices. Principals in the parochial schools handled our request to contact a teacher at the school level.

Table 1 shows a breakdown of the 2005 kindergarten school names furnished by parents on returned panel maintenance forms. Most schools could be found in either the CCD or the PSS. The advance information regarding unlisted kindergarten programs allowed them to be added to the school lookup table in the parent CAPI instrument prior to fielding, thereby reducing the chance of reporting/recording error, and increasing efficiency.

Table 1. Percentage of 2005 kindergartens named during panel maintenance found in NCES databases

	Number	Percentage
Total	231	100
Found in NCES database	204	88
Home school	10	4
No NCES listing	17	7

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Early Childhood Longitudinal Study-Birth Cohort (ECLS-B), Combined Kindergarten-1st Grade Field Test.

2.4 Recommendations for the National Study on Advance Identification of Schools

- Maintain the request for prospective kindergarten information on the panel maintenance form. Parents were responsive to the request and the accuracy was sufficiently high to make an advance notification process worthwhile.
- Delete the request for teacher name from the panel maintenance form. If mailed in early spring as intended, parents are unlikely to know the teacher's name at that point. We want them to return the form promptly rather than hold on to it until they can furnish the teacher's name. This behavior was seen during the field test. Also, the teacher's name is not needed until the point at which the parent consents to have the teacher contacted, which takes place during the home visit.
- Delete the request for the school administrator name from the panel maintenance form. While this information might have been useful for the advance notification

mailing, results from the K-1 Field Test parent CAPI instrument indicated that only 63 percent of parents knew the first and last name of the administrator where their child was currently attending school. This number was low enough to recommend continuing to mail informational packets to “PRINCIPAL” at the identified school. If asked for a principal name up to 6 months before the child starts school, the reliability of the information would be even more suspect.

- Create a process by which an automated match of parent-furnished school names combined with city and state to NCES school ID numbers could be attempted. The process of matching parent-furnished school names with NCES school ID numbers was arduous and, to a great extent, unavoidable. Many parents fail to provide the school’s full name. Simply failing to add the word “elementary” to the school’s name will prevent a match. However, if successful in even 5 percent of cases, that could reduce the number of manual look-ups by several hundred cases for the national study.

3. Advance Notification of States, Districts, and Schools

3.1 Advance Mailing to States

As part of the advance notification process, the CSSOs in each of the seven field test states were sent an informational packet about the ECLS-B project and the upcoming K-1 Field Test to be conducted in their state that fall. The packets were mailed on June 24, 2005, within 1 week of ERB approval. They contained a cover letter printed on project letterhead explaining the study and its goals. The letter identified that the current contact concerned participation in a field test and described the nature of the teacher’s involvement. The study’s toll-free number was provided if they had any questions (see attachment 3). A letter from NCES printed on agency letterhead was also included as a means of further legitimizing the study and our contact (see attachment 4). Lastly, a copy of the NCES ECLS-B “Data Users” brochure was included (see attachment 5). This brochure had been designed for NCES and was available for distribution by the Government Printing Office (GPO). The packet was sent via First-Class Mail in a #10 window envelope with the study logo.

For the K-1 Field Test only, follow-up phone calls were placed to each state CSSO to confirm that they received the mailing and see what types of questions or concerns they would express. This contact was not a formal data collection vehicle; therefore there were no scripted questions. Project staff simply responded to the questions posed. However, the opportunity to get any type of feedback was anticipated to be useful for preparing K-1 Field Test training materials. We successfully reached the CSSO or designee in only two of the seven states. Both expressed enthusiasm about the study. In the remaining states a secretary acknowledged receipt of the materials, indicated that the recipient had no questions and/or that, because no action was required on the part of their office, the information had been filed.

3.2 Advance Mailing to Districts

Advance mailings were sent to 57 districts as well. These districts were identified by their affiliation with the schools parents identified during the Preschool Field Test. The packets were mailed at the same time as the state packets and contained the same materials. However, the cover letter to district superintendents was modified slightly to indicate that they “may have” a

participating child in their district in the fall (see attachment 6). The actual presence of a study participant in the district would not be confirmed until the home visit in the fall.

Again, a subsample of district superintendents was selected for phone follow-up 1 week later to see what questions or comments they had. Calls were placed to 21 districts. A project staff member was able to discuss the study with personnel in 10 districts but only one of these contacts was with the superintendent. Many of the districts had someone other than the superintendent charged with handling research requests. During this process we encountered two districts that declined to participate although one ultimately agreed to receive our informational packet again in the fall if a study participant was in the district. Most of the districts we successfully contacted indicated that they had some formal or informal process of review or were in the midst of developing one. As will be discussed further in section 6.2.3, this did not prove to be the norm during the K-1 Field Test.

A key discovery of these follow-up calls was that the minimal level of burden required of the school was not being effectively communicated in the advance notification version of the school administrator letter. The letter was redesigned for the fall notification process to place greater emphasis on this fact. Also, responses to some of the more typical questions were incorporated and/or highlighted. The increased awareness of the types of questions administrators asked was also integrated into the training of the institutional contactors (ICs) responsible for making the school contacting calls in the fall.

3.3 Advance Mailing to Schools

Advance mailings went out to 42 schools on July 7, 2006, 2 weeks after the district packets were sent. These schools represented a subset of those identified by parents during the Preschool Field Test. Other than the cover letter now being addressed to the principal, the packets were identical to those sent to the district superintendents. Their cover letter also indicated that they “may have” a participating child in their district in the fall. Follow-up calls to a subsample of school principals began 1 week later. Staff was able to speak directly with principals at three of the 16 schools attempted. Most school principals were unavailable during the month of July and in many instances mail wasn’t even delivered to the school during July. The information gleaned from school contacts was corroborating the feedback obtained at the district level so calling was suspended. Two additional observations were made, however. Due to a substantial amount of turnover, the principal names extracted from the NCES database were often out of date. This also occurred at the superintendent level but less frequently. Secondly, if a letter was addressed to the former principal it was frequently forwarded on to that specific individual at the new location. Based upon these observations, the decision was made to mail fall notification packets to “SUPERINTENDENT” and “PRINCIPAL.”

3.4 Recommendations for the National Study Regarding Advance Notification Procedures

- An early- to mid-August mailing of the advance notification packets is recommended. Sending the packet to school administrators at the end of the school year did not encourage careful consideration. It did not require action on their part. Also, the study was perceived as part of “next year.” It could, therefore, be tabled. A midsummer delivery garnered some attention at the district level but school principals were

unlikely to be available. Notification just before the new school year begins might gain more attention.

- Plans for using the advance notification process as a means for identifying districts with required research applications and then submitting spring and/or summer research applications to speed fall contacting should be discarded. Use of the advance notification mailing as a vehicle for identifying schools with district research application requirements proved ineffective. We did not put a great deal of emphasis on this subject in the letter so as not to invite more applications than would really be necessary. However, no district or school proactively contacted project staff to alert them to a requirement in their district as a result of reading the letter. In all instances the need for an application was learned during a follow-up call. Follow-up calls during the advance notification stage were not part of the research design or budget for the Kindergarten 2006 National Study. However, the absence of advance notification calls is not an impediment. Conversations about research applications when mentioned indicated advance submission was not realistic. The districts would want to know what schools and in some cases which teachers had been identified. This information would not be available.
- Our recommendation is to continue with the planned use of First-Class Mail delivery of the informational packets. Spontaneous recall of the mailing was limited but recollection when described was frequent. More important than use of an express delivery service to facilitate the successful implementation of the study is the development of a clear and succinct cover letter that quickly answers the key concerns of a school administrator.

4. Organizational Endorsements

4.1 Description

To further demonstrate the esteem with which the ECLS-B project is held and to motivate both teachers and school administrators to cooperate, endorsements from a variety of educational organizations to which they might belong were solicited. This strategy was employed for ECLS-K, as well. Endorsements were collected and endorsing organizations were listed in the left-hand margin of the ECLS-K letterhead. RTI contacted and requested endorsements from most of the same organizations that appeared on the ECLS-K stationery. Informational packets containing a cover letter from the RTI principal investigator with the study's toll-free number listed, a letter from NCES verifying the legitimacy of our request, and an ECLS-B Data Users brochure were sent via Federal Express to the identified organizations. The request and endorsement form can be seen in attachment 7. In all, 15 organizations were approached and 10 agreed. The other organizations failed to respond within the necessary timeframe; no organizations declined. The organizations that agreed to endorse the birth cohort of the ECLS can be seen in attachment 8.

4.2 Recommendations for the National Study on Organizational Endorsements

- We recommend a revision to the letterhead. Window envelopes were selected for use as being more efficient and cost-effective. Unfortunately, the left-hand margin of the letterhead in which the endorsing organizations appear intrudes upon the window

space. We believe a redesign to prevent this occurrence will present a more professional appearance.

5. Parental Consent to Contact Teacher

5.1 Overview of the Process

During the course of their home visit parents were asked whether they would permit the study to contact their child's teacher to inquire about the child's achievement and behavior in the school setting. When prompted by the computer-assisted personal interviewing (CAPI) instrument, the field interviewer (FI) explained the purpose for contacting children's teachers and what would be involved on the teacher's part. They then asked the parent to sign the multipart hard copy "Permission to Contact Child's Teacher" form (see attachment 9).

Once the form was signed, the parent was then asked for the teacher's name, school administrator's name, and school name. To increase the accuracy of the school names and addresses, a lookup table of all kindergarten and elementary schools in the CCD and PSS databases was preloaded into the CAPI instrument. The FI simply had to enter the first three letters of a school name and potential matches came up. As the FI continued to type, the number of potential matches continued to narrow. Once the correct school name was found and selected, the parent was asked to confirm the address of the school. If a school was not found in the lookup table, then the FI had to enter the school name and address into text fields.

Only 2 of 250 parents refused to consent, for a refusal rate of less than 1 percent. Following the home visit, the FI sent two copies of the signed consent form via overnight delivery service to RTI for receipting and inclusion in the teacher questionnaire packets as needed. The original was left in the case folder and another copy was left with the respondent.

5.2 Level of Sample Dispersion

During the planning phase of the study, very little information was available with which to predict the level of dispersion of a birth cohort and therefore the level of time and effort that might be required to complete the school contacting. Table 2 shows the original assumptions that were made at the time of the proposal and the actual numbers encountered in the K-1 Field Test sample. Note that the K-1 Field Test sample consisted of longitudinal sample members and newly recruited supplemental sample members. Longitudinal sample members, all of whom were born in 2000, were defined as those who had participated in the Preschool Field Test. That is, families who were newly recruited for the Preschool Field Test were considered longitudinal sample members for the K-1 Field Test because all families had participated at least once before. Newly recruited supplemental sample members had children who were born in 1999 and were attending kindergarten or first grade. Of the 248 "school-study-eligible" sample members—that is, those who were attending kindergarten or first grade and whose parent consented to teacher contact—142 were longitudinal sample members and the remaining 106 were newly recruited supplemental sample members.

Table 2. Proposed vs. actual K-1 Field Test sample dispersion levels

	Proposed	Actual
Number of children per teacher	1.0	1.0
Number of children per school	1.5	1.2
Number of children per district	4.5	2.8

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Early Childhood Longitudinal Study-Birth Cohort (ECLS-B), Combined Kindergarten-1st Grade Field Test.

5.3 Recommendations for the National Study on the Parental Consent Process

- Disposition instructions should be added to the bottom of the “Permission to Contact Child’s Teacher” form to ensure that FIs understand how each copy of that form should be handled. Prompt return of the copies to be included in the teacher questionnaire packets is necessary to initiate teacher questionnaire mailing. Maintaining the original in the case folder provides a backup copy in the event an overnighted package goes astray.

6. Notification of Districts and Schools during Data Collection

6.1 Informational Packets by Mail

6.1.1 Process. Informational packets were sent on a flow basis to schools and their respective district offices as they were identified during home visits. Data identifying teachers and schools were transmitted nightly from the field. School NCES ID numbers were matched to districts. Schools not found in the lookup table during the CAPI interview had to be processed manually. The school name was reviewed and the NCES database checked to confirm that the school indeed had no listing. If the school was found, the NCES school ID was assigned and the school and its affiliated district reentered the mail queue. If the school was not in the NCES database, a Web site or address listing for the school was sought on the Internet. Once a viable mailing address was confirmed and the existence of a district office checked, the school was assigned a proxy school ID number and it reentered the mail queue.

These school and district data were then used to generate cover letters to the school principal and, if applicable, to the district superintendent. Parents’ ability to supply the principal’s full name was limited. Only 63 percent could supply a first and last name and then the spelling of those names was still in doubt. Also, from the advance contacting experience, we discovered that the level of turnover was higher than expected. Relying on the principal names furnished in the NCES databases seemed unwise, especially since correspondence addressed to the former principal was often forwarded to their new assignment rather than staying with the school. Even school and/or district Web sites were not kept current for administrator names. Therefore, cover letters had personalized addresses but no recipient names, only job titles.

It should be noted that each school and district received only one mailing. The identification of a second teacher in the school did not trigger a second informational packet. Neither did a subsequently identified school trigger a second mailing to the district.

6.1.2 Content of Mailing. The content of the informational packets was identical to that used during the advance notification process. That is, they contained a cover letter from the RTI principal investigator, a letter from NCES legitimizing the study and our contact, and a copy of the ECLS-B Data Users brochure. Because school attendance was now confirmed by the parent during the home visit, the letter informed recipients that “you have” rather than “you may have” a study participant in your school or district.

However, based upon the feedback gained from the follow-up calls made during the advance notification process, the cover letter underwent substantial revision. The content was reformatted to make the information that administrators would want to know more accessible. For example, certain information was bulleted and/or underlined. Additionally, the text was revised to answer the key questions administrators had asked but had not been answered in the initial version of the letter, e.g., how parental consent was obtained. Attachment 10 shows the revised letter. The packets were again sent in #10 business envelopes with the study logo via First-Class Mail.

6.2 School Contacting Calls

6.2.1 Purpose. The purpose of the phone call to the school by an institutional contactor (IC) was fourfold:

1. to confirm the spelling of the teacher’s name;
2. to confirm the mailing address to be used for the teacher questionnaire;
3. to confirm receipt of the informational packet sent to the principal; and
4. to speak with the principal to answer questions and confirm that there were no impediments to proceeding with the questionnaire mail-out.

The first two were critical to the success of the study. Teachers can’t answer questionnaires they have not received. The last two were included to make sure the schools were aware of the study in which their teachers were being asked to participate. Although other studies have taken the route of mailing directly to the teacher without the benefit of consultation with the school administration, NCES has a history of longstanding collegial relationships with the educational community and didn’t want to jeopardize them by appearing to bypass school administrations.

6.2.2 Process. As mentioned in section 6.1.1, the school contacting process began when data were transmitted from the field signaling a parent had consented to the teacher contact and had identified a teacher and a school. This information was utilized to identify the corresponding district office (if there was one) in the NCES database. The school and district identities were then loaded into a mailing application to generate an informational packet for both the district superintendent and the school principal. When the packets were mailed a timer was set for 5 business days to elapse. On the sixth day, the school was released for assignment in the Institutional Contacting System (ICS). Project staff then assigned one of the project-trained ICs to work that case. That is, the IC needed to accomplish the four tasks outlined above: to confirm the spelling of the teacher’s name, to confirm the school mailing address, to determine whether the ECLS-B informational packet had arrived, and to contact the principal to see if he or she had any questions or concerns about the study.

Four ICs and two supervisors were trained by project staff on October 10, 2005, prior to initiating the “school contacting call” phase of the study. They were provided first with an overview of the ECLS-B project and the study’s sponsors. They then learned specifically about the teacher survey portion of the study and their role in it. The four goals they needed to accomplish were explained and they were instructed how best to accomplish them. The most challenging task to complete was the principal contact. The ICs were trained to describe the study succinctly, clearly, and confidently. Building upon the advance notification experience, training materials were developed that identified the most common questions asked and concerns voiced and how to respond to them. To maintain the intent of the passive consent process, the ICs were also instructed to ask whether the principal had any concerns *before* we mailed the teacher questionnaire instead of asking permission to mail the teacher questionnaire. That is, cooperation was to be assumed. Finally, they were trained to use the ICS to track their assignments and progress toward the four goals. Training included mock phone calls, and each IC had to be certified on project procedures before beginning work.

The ICS had stages for every step in the school contacting process from the onset of the district and school mailings through the receipt of the completed teacher questionnaire. Each of the four goals to be accomplished by the ICs had its own stage. Within each stage were a variety of status codes that could be assigned to track what actions had been taken and what steps were pending. ICs were informed that the expectation was that these four tasks for each school could be completed in a single call if the principal was available and should be completed in 2 to 3 days. Supervisors and project staff could review progress made at the school, district, state, and IC level. In addition to the stages associated with the four main goals, codes could be assigned that would alert project staff that its intervention was needed, for example, to fax information to the school. There were also stages to track the need for and progress toward filing research applications and the outcomes of those applications. Once the IC learned about the existence of an application requirement, further contact with that school and all others associated with that district was suspended until the application situation was resolved.

6.2.3 Call Results. Below is a summary of the information gained as a result of pursuing the four goals that ICs were charged with completing.

As noted earlier, it was essential that the spelling of teachers’ names be correct. Receipt of a questionnaire with their name misspelled would make a poor first impression and could damage the credibility of our request. While the majority of parents could provide a first and last name for their child’s teacher, 25 percent knew only the teacher’s last name and 6 percent knew only the first name. Also, parents’ being able to provide a name was no guarantee that they knew the correct spelling. A comparison of the “parent-provided” teacher name in the CAPI instrument with the teacher name confirmed by the school during the school contacting process showed that 34 percent of the teacher names underwent some degree of modification.

Although most addresses were downloaded from the NCES database, a confirmation of the school’s mailing address proved prudent. In some instances the street address that the parent provided was not the proper mailing address. In other instances schools actually relocated (or the district office through which their mail was processed did) and so the NCES database address was outdated. Then, of course, there were schools children attended that were not found in the NCES database, and other means were utilized to confirm an address.

The third goal of the school contact was to confirm with either the principal or another staff member the receipt of the informational packet. This goal could be accomplished in several ways. As discovered during the advance notification process, some offices actually logged their mail and could confirm that the packet was received because there was a written record of its arrival. Some could spontaneously recall the packet when asked while others could recollect it if described to them in more detail. However, in 31 percent of cases, the principal indicated no knowledge of whether the packet was received. In these circumstances, the IC could request a remailing or faxing of the materials. Then again, if the IC was able to describe the study and the level of effort required of the school to the principal's satisfaction over the phone, study materials did not need to be resent.

The last goal of this call to the school was the principal contact. The purpose of this contact was to answer any questions the principal might have or address any concerns expressed. If there were none and no other obstacles were encountered, the IC indicated that the teacher's questionnaire packet would probably be arriving within the next week. In some cases the ICs were unable to speak with the principal (or designee). ICs were instructed to make up to three substantive call attempts to reach the principal. A substantive call would be one, for example, that left a detailed message about the study in the individual's voice mailbox. If ICs sensed that the principal was avoiding their call and they had made three substantive attempts, the ICs were instructed to leave the "final" message. This message again reviewed the purpose of the call and indicated that because of the continued difficulty in trying to reach the person, if the principal did not return the call within the next 5 days, the IC would assume the principal had no questions or concerns and we would go ahead and mail the teacher questionnaire. The system set a timer for 5 business days to elapse. If the principal had not called to express any concerns, the teacher questionnaire was placed in the mailout queue on the sixth day. Of the 175 cases which completed the "principal contact" stage, 26 percent of them moved on to teacher questionnaire mailout as a result of the "three contacts plus 5 day wait" approach.

6.3 District Application Requirements

A district application requirement rate of 8 percent was experienced. In all but one case, this discovery was made during the principal phone contact. The final one was discovered as a result of the phone follow-up to a district office during the advance notification process. Such district-level phone contacts are not part of the methodology design for the National Study. This was actually about half of the 15 percent rate that had originally been projected and considerably less than district feedback during the advance notification process had suggested. Yet this 8 percent of districts represented 20 percent of the schools and 21 percent of study participants.

We had also projected that the amount of time necessary to complete a district application would be about a quarter or less of the time it actually took. District applications were very idiosyncratic, limiting our ability to easily recycle already developed text. The district applications were designed for review of research requests that would have a substantial impact on school activities, that would involve many students, or that were for dissertation-level projects where funding and outside oversight might be limited, potentially putting the district at risk. Requests for full proposals with literature reviews and line item budgets may be justified in these cases. However, they were inappropriate and unnecessarily detailed for the ECLS-B situation; here, permission was being sought only to let a handful of kindergarten or first grade teachers in the district be mailed a questionnaire for a single child in their classroom whose parent had

already given consent and to let the teachers decide on an individual basis whether to complete the questionnaire.

During the course of the K-1 Field Test, we learned of six situations in which district-level research application requests were required. Applications were completed and submitted in four of the six instances. Ultimately approval was achieved in all four but the first to be filed took over 3 months to be approved and data collection had ended before notification of our approval was received. We were unable or unwilling to meet the requirements for two district applications and therefore made the decision to drop those teachers from the survey. In one instance, the application made clear that no research would be approved unless it had substantial benefits to that particular school district. In another, the application was set forth as a contract that had several clauses with which the ECLS-B project could not or would not comply. These two districts represented 8 percent of all the schools identified by the parents.

Application fees were encountered in two districts or 33 percent of the application situations experienced. In both instances the fee was \$25. Such fees are a recent and growing addition to the educational research scene and have the potential to be burdensome given our “1.2 students per school” and “2.8 students per district” situation. Such fees were unusual at the time our proposal was submitted and were not included in the budget.

One additional application-related field test experience should be noted. In at least half of the districts identified, the first or even the fifth principal contacted in that district made no mention of a district application process and raised no objection to the mailing of the teacher survey. These SAQ packets were sent out and in some instances already returned before a subsequent principal informed us of the application requirement. After we learned of this requirement, further school contacting and teacher mailings or call attempts were suspended until a district application had been submitted and approved. It was unclear whether the principals contacted first made individual determinations that our request did not rise to the level of mandatory district oversight or whether they simply overlooked the district process.

6.4 School Cooperation Rates

The level of school cooperation was 90 percent. A 75 percent cooperation rate had been assumed. There were 204 schools identified by the 248 parents who consented to teacher contact. When data collection ended, 20 schools had not yet been released for participation at the district level and a single principal had refused. The final pending district application was approved just after data collection concluded and would have released 7 more of those 20 schools for principal contacting. The main source of teacher exclusion was those instances in which the determination was made not to pursue a district-level application. In almost every other instance, teacher surveys were ultimately released or would have been had data collection continued. There were a handful of initial principal refusals but in almost every case, that refusal was converted once the IC had the opportunity to correct misperceptions about the school’s level of burden. In one instance, a teacher strike had just ended and the principal requested that we wait. Surveys were eventually released for mailing to these teachers, as well. Table 3 shows the final status of each of the 248 cases in the teacher survey sample.

Table 3. Final status distribution of teacher cases

	Number	Percentage
Total	248	100
Number of cases released for SAQ #1 mailing	201	81
Number pending SAQ #1 mailing	12	5
Number of cases dropped due to lack of pursuit because of district requirements	20	8
Number of cases where principal contact was still in progress	9	4
Number of cases with district-level refusal	3	1
Number of cases with school-level refusal	1	0
Number of cases where parent-identified teacher was unknown to school	1	0
Ineligible—home schooled	1	0

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Early Childhood Longitudinal Study-Birth Cohort (ECLS-B), Combined Kindergarten-1st Grade Field Test.

The K-1 Field Test plan originally called for a comparison of cooperation rates by advance notification status. The kindergartens identified by parents during the Preschool Field Test were subsetting so that some kindergartens and their districts received the advance notification and others did not. Of course, all kindergartens identified for the first time during the fall data collection became part of the “no advance notification” group. First graders were to be omitted from this comparison so as not to confound the results by grade level.

Because of the difficulty in recruiting supplemental sample, about half of the cases intended to be first graders were replaced with longitudinal kindergarten cases. Their addition made the “no advance notification” group much larger than originally intended and compromised the comparison. Given that fact and such an overall high level of school cooperation, the comparison became moot.

We still looked at the length of time it took to complete the “principal contact” stage. The stage began when a school was released into the ICS and assigned to an IC. The stage was successfully completed when the teacher SAQ #1 mailing was triggered. Schools where advance notification had taken place completed the stage in 16.2 days on average. Those without the benefit of the advance notification completed the stage on average in 15.1 days. The small sample size does not permit significance testing. Table 4 shows the duration in weeks for the principal contact stage to be completed broken out by advance notification status.

Table 4. K-1 Field Test duration of principal contacting stage by notification status

	Advance Notification		No Advance Notification		Total	
	N	Percentage	N	Percentage	N	Percentage
Total	25	17	125	83	150	100
≤ 1 wk	5	20	37	30	42	28
> 1 but ≤ 2 wks	6	24	31	25	37	25
> 2 but ≤ 3 wks	9	36	31	25	40	27
> 3 but ≤ 4 wks	1	4	9	7	10	7
> 4 but ≤ 5 wks	1	4	4	3	5	3
> 5 but ≤ 6 wks	2	8	7	5	9	5
> 6 but ≤ 7 wks	0	0	1	.5	1	.5
> 7 but ≤ 8 wks	0	0	3	2	3	2
> 8 but ≤ 9 wks	0	0	0	0	0	0
> 9 but ≤ 10 wks	1	4	0	0	1	.5
> 10 but ≤ 11 wks	0	0	1	.5	1	.5
> 11 but ≤ 12 wks	0	0	0	0	1	.5
> 12 but ≤ 13 wks	0	0	0	0	0	0
> 13 but ≤ 14 wks	0	0	0	0	0	0
> 14 but ≤ 15 wks	0	0	1	.5	1	.5

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Early Childhood Longitudinal Study-Birth Cohort (ECLS-B), Combined Kindergarten-1st Grade Field Test.

6.5 Recommendations for the National Study on School and District Notification

- We recommend additional revisions to the school administrator cover letter in both style and substance. The K-1 Field Test experience demonstrated that the fall version of the letter was still frequently misunderstood if read at all. The answers to the questions the ICs received could almost always be found in the text of the letter.
 - During the last iteration bulleted items were used for summation and appeared on the second page of the letter. Bulleted items should instead appear at the beginning of the letter as a form of executive summary. Also, the letter should ideally be limited to a single page. Barring that, its density should be reduced so that it is more visually appealing and easier to scan.
 - The tone of the letter should also be changed. Introducing the ECLS-B as another comprehensive and complex study being conducted by NCES encourages the reader to prematurely jump to a conclusion and inaccurately assume that ECLS-B is a highly burdensome research request, especially if the reader was familiar with the ECLS-K project. We propose to describe the study as designed specifically to avoid burdening the schools by continuing the bulk of the data collection in the home. No administrative oversight would be required and the teacher is not obligated to participate.

- We recommend that the school contacting calls be continued.
 - These calls provided critical information regarding teachers' names and addresses. Without this quality check, the professional appearance of our teacher questionnaire packets would be compromised. The calls also provided the opportunity to gather teacher e-mail addresses, which were not and will not be requested of parents in the CAPI instrument and which are probably unknown to most of them anyway.
 - However, we also recommend removing the principal phone contact as an obligatory stage in the school contacting process. In the vast majority of cases principals were agreeable once they understood the burden (or lack thereof) on the school. Even in schools where an application process existed, some of the principals seemed to have decided that our request did not cross the threshold for requiring that step to be taken. We believe a clear understanding of the school's role can be communicated sufficiently through the further refinement of the informational packet materials rather than requiring the phone contact. However, we will remain flexible and open to calling principals as needed. With the proposed gap in mailing between the administrator informational packets and the teacher questionnaire packets of at least 5 business days, concerned administrators will have sufficient time to notify RTI of the need to hold the teacher mailing. Even if the administrator failed to notify us and the teacher mailing went out, the teacher still has the opportunity to discuss it with the principal and contact us if there are concerns. We can initiate the filling of a required research application at any stage in the process when we become aware of its need. We have the ability to promptly suspend all mailings to teachers in that district until proper approvals have been received and doing so should maintain good rapport with the districts.
- No changes to the informational packet mailing process are recommended. Use of First-Class Mail in combination with an envelope bearing the ECLS-B logo should gain sufficient attention to get the envelope opened. Because there is no specific and/or immediate action required at the school or district level to proceed with teacher contact (if the recommendation to dispense with an obligatory phone contact to the principal is adopted), the expense of a mail delivery service does not seem necessary to the success of the study. However, it is critical that the project logo continue to appear on the envelope. This helps to distinguish our mailing from advertisements and other outside contacts. Receipt of an identifiable mailing from the ECLS-B project by an educational professional at an educational institution is in no way stigmatizing. Neither does it compromise the identity of any study participant.
- Although the ICs all felt they had received adequate training, we recommend that further refinements to the IC training materials be made to incorporate the experiences gained from the field test and the strategies learned. Mainly these revisions involve instruction on the further refinements to be made to the ICS. However, another item should be added to the Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) sheet addressing issues of confidentiality and principals' requests for the child's identity. Information about the child's identity was never provided by project staff to anyone other than the designated teacher in the SAQ mailing. The ICs did not have access to the child's identity either. If the obligatory principal contact is dropped, this

situation will be encountered less frequently but the ICs still need training on how to present confidentiality as a protection of the student rather than a withholding of information from the principal.

- We are not making any recommendations to change our procedures for responding to district requirements assuming that the recommendation to forego a required phone follow-up call with principals is accepted. While preparation of these materials can be extraordinarily time consuming in many instances, our success rate has been excellent. We anticipate a significant drop in the need for application filings as a result so the additional effort can be accommodated. When the obligatory phone conversations with the principals are suspended, the opportunity for principals to use the application as a way of prematurely terminating the interaction will be significantly reduced. We will, however, remain alert to all concerns and flexible in our responses to them.

7. Teacher Survey

7.1 Contacting Sequence

The first teacher self-administered questionnaire (SAQ) was released for mailing after the four school contacting stages were completed. That is, both the teacher's name and the school mailing address had to have been confirmed. Also, the IC had to inquire about receipt of the informational packet. However, as mentioned in section 6.2.2, if a conversation with the principal described the study to his or her satisfaction, confirmed possession of an informational packet was not necessary. Finally, the principal contacting stage had to have been completed. Completion could occur either with a conversation with the principal (or designee) with no remaining concerns or with the passage of 5 business days after the final message had been left.

When the required ICS criteria were achieved, the mailout application was triggered to prepare the merge files necessary to produce the teacher cover letter and the barcode label to be affixed to the front cover of the SAQ. A copy of the cover letter can be found in attachment 11. The first teacher SAQ packet contained the following materials:

- a personalized cover letter from the RTI principal investigator;
- the letter from NCES;
- the Data User brochure;
- a copy of the SAQ with a barcode label attached to the front cover;
- a signed copy of the parent's "Permission to Contact Child's Teacher" form;
- a stamped envelope for return of the completed questionnaire; and
- a \$10 gift card to a national book store chain.

Four days after the SAQ #1 was mailed, a follow-up letter was sent. This letter, seen in attachment 12, served dual purposes. It thanked teachers who had already returned the questionnaire and reminded those who hadn't that we would appreciate their participation. Two weeks after the first SAQ packet was mailed, if a completed questionnaire had not yet been

returned, a second SAQ packet was generated. This packet was virtually identical to the first one sent. The cover letter was slightly modified (see attachment 13) and the incentive was omitted.

The next contact to be made with the teacher, if a questionnaire had not yet been returned after 2 additional weeks had passed, was a reminder call made by phone to the school. The IC called the school office and requested the best times to try to reach the teacher by phone. The office staffer was asked, for example, whether the teacher tended to arrive early or stay after school or had a free period during which he or she might be reached. Using this information, the IC was authorized to make up to five attempts to reach the teacher. However, if a teacher could not be reached in person, only a single substantive message could be left. A suggested script for this contact and a sample voice mail message can be found in attachment 14. Of the 50 prompting calls attempted, in only 11 cases did the IC actually speak with the teacher. However, ERB approval came late in the data collection period and ICs were encouraged to leave messages on the first or second attempt so that all teachers at the prompting call stage would receive at least a message.

At the suggestion of the ICs, ERB approval was requested to send an e-mail message to teachers who had not returned a questionnaire within 2 weeks of the prompting call. The text of this message can be seen in attachment 15. Approval for this added contact also came late in the data collection period. Because it was not part of the original survey protocol, teachers' school e-mail addresses had not been requested at the time of the school contacting calls when teacher names and addresses were being confirmed. Therefore, this information was requested when the teacher prompting calls were attempted. E-mail messages were sent to 30 teachers for whom a school e-mail address was obtained. Another 18 were eligible for the contact but had no school e-mail address. These messages were sent immediately due to the pending conclusion of data collection.

7.2 Teacher Questionnaire Processing

Upon their arrival at the RTI central office, teacher questionnaires, which have a barcode label affixed to the front cover, were receipted by scanning the bar code. This process significantly reduced the opportunity for error at check-in. Groups of five SAQs were then put in batches with a batch header sheet identifying the included questionnaires. The batches were then transferred to a secure storage area until they were removed for scanning.

7.3 Teacher Response Rates

The projected response rate of 75 percent was ultimately exceeded. Table 5 shows the projected and actual response rates by protocol stage. As can be seen, the larger than anticipated response rate to the first stage mailing satisfactorily offset the shortfalls in the last two stages. Stage 1 was the only stage to be fully implemented. That is, the data collection period ended while some teachers had yet to receive a reminder letter, the SAQ #2 mailing, and/or a prompting phone call.

Table 6 shows the response rate by stage for public and private schools. Table 7 shows the teacher response rate by grade level.

Table 5. K-1 Field Test projected and actual teacher response rates by stage

	Projected Percentage	Actual Percentage
Total Response Rate	75	79
Teacher SAQ #1	35	45
Teacher SAQ #2	25	21
Teacher Prompting Call	15	12

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Early Childhood Longitudinal Study-Birth Cohort (ECLS-B), Combined Kindergarten-1st Grade Field Test.

Table 6. K-1 Field Test public vs. private school teacher response rates by stage

	Public School		Private School	
	N	Percentage	N	Percentage
Total Response Rate	166	78	35	83
Teacher SAQ #1	71	43	20	57
Teacher SAQ #2	35	21	7	20
Teacher Prompting Call	23	14	2	6

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Early Childhood Longitudinal Study-Birth Cohort (ECLS-B), Combined Kindergarten-1st Grade Field Test.

Table 7. K-1 Field Test teacher response rate by grade

	N returned	Percentage
Total	158	79
Kindergarten	117	79
First Grade	41	77

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Early Childhood Longitudinal Study-Birth Cohort (ECLS-B), Combined Kindergarten-1st Grade Field Test.

7.4 Recommendations for the National Study Regarding the Teacher Survey

- We recommend staying with the mailed survey methodology supplemented with a prompting phone call and reminder e-mail. However, for the National Study we recommend that the e-mail message take on a somewhat different tone and timing. That is, we would like the text of the e-mail message to be similar to that of the reminder/thank you letter sent by regular mail and be timed similarly, i.e., sent 4 days after the teacher SAQ is mailed. Also, we think another e-mail should be sent 4 days after the second SAQ is mailed. It is a low-cost opportunity to add a contact—no postage or paper is required and the send-out can be automated. Also, the likelihood of reaching teachers by e-mail is higher than catching a teacher on the phone while at school.
- To help achieve the desired teacher response rate, we recommend inclusion of a third SAQ mailing to follow 2 weeks after the reminder call is placed if a completed questionnaire has not yet been returned. This SAQ #3 packet would include the same contents as the second mailing but would be sent via a mail delivery service.

- To further motivate teacher participation we recommend the inclusion of two additional items in the SAQ packet. The first seeks to motivate through the personal connection a teacher may have with the student and his or her family. We recommend providing parents with the opportunity to make a personal appeal for the teacher's participation. A short note can be composed for parents to sign at the time of their home visit. This message would point out the family's commitment to and participation in the project since their child was only 9 months old and would ask the teacher to consider participating, too, in the final phase of this important study. The second addition seeks to inspire participation through an appeal to the teacher as a member of the education profession. A "teacher fact sheet" should be developed that would speak directly to the essential contribution of teachers to the ECLS-B project. It would describe why teachers' input is so valuable and how the successful completion of this study will contribute to the profession and their ability to succeed in the goal of educating young children. This teacher fact sheet would replace the Data Users brochure.

Table 8 summarizes the recommended changes to the teacher survey methodology.

Table 8. K-1 Field Test methodology and national study recommended methodology

K-1 Field Test	Kindergarten 2006
Advance mail notification of schools/districts	Advance mail notification of schools/districts
Parental permission for teacher contact	Parental permission for teacher contact
Fall mail notification of schools/districts	Fall mail notification of schools/districts
School contact to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confirm spelling of teacher's name • Confirm school mailing address • Confirm receipt of mailing • Answer principal's questions 	School contact to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confirm spelling of teacher's name • Confirm school mailing address • Request teacher's email address
Mail teacher questionnaire packet #1 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cover letter • NCES letter • ECLS-B data users brochure • Copy of parent permission form • Stamped return envelope • \$10 gift card 	Mail teacher questionnaire packet #1 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cover letter • NCES letter • Teacher fact sheet¹ • Copy of parent permission form • Parent notification letter to teacher • Stamped return envelope • \$10 gift card
Mail thank you/reminder letter	Send thank you/reminder letter by mail and email
Mail teacher questionnaire packet #2 (no additional gift card)	Mail teacher questionnaire packet #2 (no additional gift card)
	Send thank you/reminder email
Place prompting call to teacher	Place prompting call to teacher
Send prompting email message	Send questionnaire packet #3 via express mail service ²

¹ For cost containment purposes NCES may opt to continue using the ECLS-B data users brochure rather than develop and produce the teacher fact sheet.

² The sending of a third questionnaire packet would be implemented if response rates are below expectations.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Early Childhood Longitudinal Study-Birth Cohort (ECLS-B), Combined Kindergarten-1st Grade Field Test.